

cross-referenced with its equivalents in other Caribbean territories as follows: *crepesoles* (Trinidad and Tobago); *half-cuts* (Barbados); *pumps* (Barbados); *punkas* (Grenada); *puss-boots* (Grenada. St.

tries, the dictionary has sections dealing with Caribbean English, Glossary of Linguistic Terminology, Layout of the [Caribbean] Steelband, National Symbols of [Caribbean] States. French and

[Metadata, citation and similar](#)

de Documents de la UAB

wankers (Trinidad and Tobago); *wasimkongs-watnekong* (Trinidad and Tobago); *yachtings*, *yachting-shoes* (Guyana).

In addition to the main lexical en-

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Indira Chowdhury SENGUPTA (comp.). *The Indian English Supplement to the Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English*. Fifth edition.

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I am struck by the remarkable amount of semi-fluent or «broken» English which is encountered in the Indian subcontinent, used by people with a limited educational background.

David Crystal, *English Today*

With massive penetration of English into the world, diverse and powerful stresses and strains are operating upon standard forms of this global language. Distinguishable varieties of English with local flavour and vibrations have emerged in the ESL (English as a Second Language) nations. On the criterion of numbers, Indian English (usually abbreviated *IE* hereafter) stands out prominently among Englishes. Although this non-native variety is

not yet entrenched and canonized by British acceptance, it is spoken by over 200 million inhabitants of India at a significant social level. This striking linguistic phenomenon can no longer be ignored and it is in this context that the *Indian English Supplement* to the 5th edition of the *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary* (*OALD*, 1996) is a trailblazing work.

Commenting on the reissue of *Hobson-Jobson*, the legendary dictionary of British India, by Routledge, Salman Rushdie noted:

I thought, too, that a modern appendix might usefully be commissioned, to include the many English words which have taken on, in independent India, new 'Hinglish' meanings. In India to-

day, the prisoner in the dock is the *undertrial*; a boss is often an *incharge*; and, in a sinister euphemism, those who perish at the hands of law enforcement officers are held to have died in a '*police encounter*' (Rushdie, 1991: 83).

The *IE Supplement* fits the bill by cataloguing disparate lexical items: 2351 Indian English headwords, 100 derivatives, 107 compounds, 46 idioms and phrasal verbs, 479 variant forms, and 134 usage notes. In addition, 1749 cross-references and 96 abbreviations have been put together. While the supplement is not aimed at English speakers in the UK, USA, and other ENL (English as a Native Language) nations, it will certainly help them in understanding Indian subjects in which such words are being increasingly used.

Attempts to compile such supplements were made earlier by R.E. Hawkins in the *Little Oxford Dictionary* (1984), by Ivor Lewis in *Sahibs, Nabobs and Boxwallahs: A Dictionary of the Words of Anglo-India* (1991), and Nigel Hankin in *Hanklyn-Janklyn* (1992). Corpus-based lexicographical work on Indian English was published by Subba Rao in 1954 through Clarendon Press and at present researchers in the English Department at Shivaji University, Kolhapur (India) are working on a corpus of spoken English (Chaudhary, 1997: 5). But the *OALD* section on Indian English is the most significant advance in this field. It shows IE as a dynamic model breaking away from the normative citadel of British English. For instance, while «absecon» is defined in the main section of the dictionary, the *Supplement* gives its meaning in the Indian context: «to go away suddenly and secretly», particularly to avoid arrest. Indians also frequently drop the preposition after this verb, unlike the standard British usage. Words like *amma* (mother), *bakwas* (nonsense), *chalu* (cunning), *chamcha* (hanger-on),

dharna (protest), *dishum dishum* (fighting in films), *four twenty* (cheat), *ins skirt* (long petticoat), *janta meal* (cheap meal), *khas land* (government land), *lassi* (a drink made from yoghurt), *maharani* (queen), *minorityware* (a type of art, entertainment, etc., that appeals to a small number of people), *nautanki* (a form of popular theatre), *paper-wala* (a person who delivers newspapers and magazines to people's homes), *prepone* (to move something to an earlier time than was originally planned), *zamindar* (landlord), etc., are used in English conversations between Indians, and as such these have been included with grammatical and syntactical descriptions, example sentences, usage notes and cline varieties to describe their current semantic implications and contextual appropriateness. Words from Indian languages that describe particular Indian objects, encyclopaedic items, and kinship terms have also been compiled for the benefit of cross-linguistic users, both Indian and foreign.

Discussing the principal purpose of the *IE Supplement*, the compiler points out: «The English we encounter in our daily lives as Indians is spiced with words that would not be understood by the English speakers in the UK. This is true not only of words current in British English that are used in a different sense here. We often *shift house*, unlike the British, who move. Or we pack things in the *dickey* and not the boot of the car, in which we might have a *stepney* instead of a spare wheel. Hybrids like *rail roko* and *double-roti* are peculiar to our vocabulary, as are compounds like *eveteaser*, *native place* or *ceasework*. In our colourful idiomatic way we might eat *somebody's head*, use *our jack* or, better still, *make chutney out of somebody*. The *Indian English Supplement* to *Oxford's Advanced Learner's Dictionary* attempts to describe this unique vocabulary and provide ready reference for Indian English.

While sociolinguists differ in their opinion regarding whether IE is a dialect, a pidgin or a creole, or a non-native variety of English at the lexico-semantic, syntactic and phonological levels, the fact remains that it has gained currency as a contact and resource language as well as a complementary code of speech. In a plural language situation like ours, English is bound to be substantially marked and dictionaries will have to face facts in the shape of new context-bound word and idiom formations like the ones in the *OALD Supplement*. In the process, normative English is likely to be broken, fractured and fashioned anew to suit the needs of speakers in their own situation. As S. Gopal notes, English is neither the sole means of communication in India, as it is in the Caribbean, nor does the country have a large community of British settlers to retain the native model. In the post-colonial situation the languages of India are giving English «an indigenous flavour» to promote «a new idiom» (Gopal, 1989:18).

Clearly, the *gallimaufry* of English has allowed unparalleled linguistic *kedgeree* by way of nativisation and acculturation. But without the intermingling of English and Indian languages the diverse socio-cultural patterns of the subcontinent could not have been manifested. Confident and daring innovations by recent Indian writers in English exemplify

the Indianisation of English in a productive way. For example: *loose-charactered people* (Dey 1989: 34), *official booze* (Chatterjee 1988: 184), *bad-element friends* (Ghosh 1986: 97), *lafangas of the bazaar world* (Desai 1984/1994: 50), *A home-bred chicken tastes no better than lentils* (Singh 1990: 87).

In the end, one feels the compiler should have picked out important signifiers of linguistic relevance from contemporary Indian English texts to demonstrate the quality of judgements that their writers make in regard to linguistic structures. Also, the *Supplement* should have covered pronunciation (strikingly different in the Indian context) because language is basically a spoken medium. The institutional variety of Indian English will acquire authority and autonomy only when its lexical, semantic, grammatical and phonological features get standardized, but it will be historically irrelevant to centre that standard on British English. We will have eventually, as Tom McArthur says, both an English language and a range of English languages. All in all, the *OALD Indian English Supplement* shows the decolonised language well on its way to becoming a rooted blossom.

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